

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES PODCAST | ICE COLD KILLER
S1E12 Transcript

MICHAEL DIEKMAN: It's very, very bizarre. We did not find anything that seemed to be disturbed within the store that was knocked over or broken. There were no tire prints. Did she know this person? Did they know her? Was this a crime of opportunity?

JESSICA WINCH: So the big mystery is, who is the last customer at the liquor store for that day that she went missing? Where are we going to look? Where are we going to start? I haven't got a clue.

NARRATION: IT'S ALMOST 10PM, CLOSING TIME AT ULTIMATE LIQUORS, A SMALL STORE IN PINE RIVER MINNESOTA. CASHIER RACHEL ANTHONY IS THE ONLY EMPLOYEE ON DUTY. OUTSIDE, THE AIR IS A BONE CHILLING MINUS 20. AS SNOW SWIRLS ACROSS BLACK, ICY ROADS, RACHEL GOES OUT IN FRONT TO START HER CAR, WARMING UP THE ENGINE FOR HER DRIVE HOME, THEN HURRIES BACK INSIDE THE STORE. HOURS LATER, RACHEL'S FORD ESCORT CONTINUES TO PUFF EXHAUST INTO THE FRIGID NIGHT AIR, WAITING PATIENTLY FOR HER TO RETURN. BUT SHE NEVER DOES.

I'M STEVE FRENCH, AND THIS IS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: "ICE COLD KILLER."

IT'S THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 27TH, 2001. IN FRONT OF ULTIMATE LIQUORS, THE CHATTERING ENGINE OF RACHEL ANTHONY'S ABANDONED CAR STRUGGLES TO STAY WARM AGAINST THE FREEZING NIGHT AIR.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: An officer who was on duty that night, he drove by approximately 10 o'clock, according to reports, and he seen her car running. And that was common. And then at that time, he went and patrolled other areas. And it was approximately 11:30, 12 o'clock that night when he drove by again, and her car was still sitting there, running.

NARRATION: INSIDE THE STORE, THERE'S NO SIGN OF RACHEL, BUT HER PERSONAL BELONGINGS ARE SITTING ON THE CHECKOUT COUNTER. THE PATROL OFFICER IMMEDIATELY REPORTS THE SUSPICIOUS SCENE, AND CASS COUNTY SHERIFF'S CRIMINAL INVESTIGATOR MICHAEL DIEKMANN IS SUMMONED FROM WHAT HE HOPED WOULD BE A QUIET NIGHT AT HOME.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: When we arrived at the scene down there, it was noted that the back door was unlocked. Rachel's purse was left there. Her coat was left there. When a person leaves a business like that, and it's 20 below zero, and the wind is blowing, you're sure as heck not going to leave without your coat. The cash register was not opened, so we could presume that the motive was not a robbery. The motive was clearly something to do with Rachel. It would give one the belief that she was taken forcibly. We believe that she probably was taken out the back door, because the front door was locked. At that time, it was believed that Rachel was abducted.

NARRATION: A RANDOM NIGHTTIME ABDUCTION FROM THIS SMALL TOWN IN THE HEART OF MINNESOTA STRIKES INVESTIGATOR DIEKMANN AS HIGHLY UNUSUAL.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: Pine River has a population of approximately 900 residents. It's not a very big town. They have one main street with businesses. As far as crime rate goes, it's a very, very little crime rate. Usually, the crimes that would have happened there would have been somewhat, I guess, some would call them minor crimes. Minor home invasions, stealing of properties, things of that nature.

NARRATION: THE MISSING WOMAN IS ALSO AN UNLIKELY VICTIM. RACHEL ANTHONY IS 50 YEARS OLD, DIVORCED WITH TWO GROWN DAUGHTERS, AND A SON. SHE'S BEEN IN PINE RIVER FOR JUST A FEW YEARS AND LIVES WITH HER OLDEST DAUGHTER, JESSICA WINCH.

JESSICA WINCH: I got a call from the liquor store owner. "You need to come into town right now. Something's not right." And I drove into town as fast as I could, and I got there, and the police were already there, and the owner of the store was there. And I was like, "What's wrong?" And they said, "Your mom's missing." And I said, "What do you mean she's missing?" And they said, "She's gone. We don't know why." And the first thing I asked them was, "Is her purse there? Is there a coat there? Is her cigarettes there?" Because mom was a smoker and she would never go anywhere without her cigarettes. And he said "Yes, yes, and yes." And then that was, like, instantly I knew something was wrong.

JESSICA WINCH: When my mom disappeared, I remember the day of the week because I bowled on a women's bowling league every Tuesday night. And coincidentally, the bowling alley is across the street from the liquor store she worked at. Because normally my bowling would get done around 9:30 at night and she would usually be closing the store at 10 o'clock, so quite often times, when I finished up with bowling, I would go across the street and say "Hi" to her. And I'll never forget that night. I got off bowling, and it's very cold outside. It's February in Minnesota, so it's really, really cold. And I got in my car, and my car was faced the opposite way, away from the liquor store. And I sat in my car and I looked over to the liquor store, and I told myself, should I go over there and help her? Should I say hi? And I told myself, "Ah, I'm just so tired. It's so cold outside. I'm just going to go home." And so, I went home instead of going over there and saying, "Hi" to her, or whatever. I have a little bit of guilt about that. What could have happened if I had gone over there?

NARRATION: THE NEWS GOES OUT TO THE REST OF RACHEL'S FAMILY, INCLUDING HER EX-HUSBAND, WHO LIVES OVER 100 MILES AWAY, AND HER DAUGHTER, TRISHA LEHR, WHO'S IN PENNSYLVANIA.

TRISHA LEHR: Jessie called me. It was early in the morning. All I remember her saying was that Mom was missing. I woke up my husband and I told him what was going on, put the dog and ourselves in the car and drove straight through. We got to Minnesota the following morning. The only thing I could think of on that car ride is, my God, we gotta get there. If she's hurt, you know, we need to be there. I don't think I wanted to think about her being dead. But, that's where denial comes in, and you just push it away. When we were really little, it was just Mom, Jessie and I. We lived together and one of my earliest memories of Mom was Jessie going off to school for the day. And Mom gave me a cup of coffee, which was mostly milk and sugar and a splash of coffee, and we sat down in the living room and she read me Beatrix Potter books. She liked to do that with us. She woke us up in the middle of the night one time to see the Northern lights. They had lit up the entire sky. It looked like we were under a

dome. And I keep remembering her smile. Her smile, you know, lit up her entire face and her eyes and everything. And she was really smart. I always wanted to be as smart as Mom.

JESSICA WINCH: Mom was never a “sit down, put your feet up, relax” kind of person. She was always doing something. Her biggest hobby our whole life growing up was she liked to write poems. So, I do remember her, that being one of her huge things in her life she was always trying to aspire towards. People will ask me all the time about Mom — Did she have enemies? Was she seeing someone and there was a bad breakup? Did she have a bad situation with one of the customers at the store she was working at, at the time when it happened? — And honestly, I cannot say she had any bad blood between anybody, and I get that asked over, and over, and over, and just nothing's ever come up.

NARRATION: THE MORNING AFTER RACHEL'S MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE, THE TOWN OF PINE RIVER COMES ALIVE WITH A SWARM OF POLICE AND MEDIA.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: When Rachel was abducted, and we set up a command post, we had approximately 50 law enforcement officers working on this, following up leads, waiting for leads. Searches were done of the area, walk through searches, aerial searches. Everything that we could have possibly done at that time, we did.

JESSICA WINCH: Pine River has the river through town and there's a big dam there, and I know that they had some divers come and check out the dam. They did all kinds of stuff.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: The street in which we're talking about, in Pine River, in reference to Rachel Anthony's abduction, was a pretty isolated area. We know that her car was the only one on the street at the time of her abduction. As far as evidence goes, there were no tire prints located. It would be extremely hard for tracks to be made in the ice. It did appear that Rachel took the garbage out the back door. At that point, we assume that Rachel was the one who locked the door, possibly right before she took the garbage out the back door. At that point, if the front door was locked, at that time, we would assume that someone was waiting out back and approached her, and that's when everything started to happen. We do also know that, from talking with other people, friends and relatives of Rachel, she was a strong person. She wouldn't have actually just left without something restricting her from fighting back. That could be determined by the suspect had a weapon. There was more than one suspect. We did not find anything that seemed to be disturbed within the store that was knocked over or broken. So, we could presume that there was no struggle.

NARRATION: USING CASH REGISTER RECEIPTS, INVESTIGATOR DIEKMANN FOCUSES ON TRACKING DOWN EVERY CUSTOMER WHO ENTERED THE STORE THAT DAY. HE IS ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS TO TALK TO RACHEL'S LAST CUSTOMER, WHO WAS IN THE STORE AT ABOUT 9:56 PM, JUST A FEW MINUTES BEFORE CLOSING TIME.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: The person who was at the store and did the last transaction with Rachel was never identified, and has never come forward.

JESSICA WINCH: So, the big mystery is, who is the last customer at the liquor store for that day that she went missing? They went back through every transaction that day and were able to trace every single receipt for the day, and question all those people, except for the very last customer. From the details I recall, is the very last customer paid with cash, so there was no credit or debit card to trace. And also, the security cameras were not working, so they don't have any video to try to use to find somebody.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: The cameras were acting up and they weren't working on their own for some reason. They were in the process of getting them fixed, but they did not get fixed at this time.

NARRATION: SO WHO WAS RACHEL'S LAST CUSTOMER, AND WHY HAVE THEY NOT COME FORWARD?

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: It's very, very bizarre. Law enforcement has not ruled out any significant parts as to, did she know this person? Did they know her? Was this a crime of opportunity? A person would think not, because of the fact that the time of night and there was no one around, so someone had to drive in and know that the store was actually open. All liquor stores off sale in the state of Minnesota, close at 10 o'clock. State law. So, everyone would have known that the liquor store closes at 10 o'clock. We don't know if the person or persons were waiting for her, had a plan. Nothing, again, law enforcement has ruled out.

NARRATION: WITH NO LEADS ON THE PRIME SUSPECT, AND NO SIGN OF RACHEL AFTER THE EXTENSIVE SEARCH, IT APPEARS THE MYSTERY OF HER VANISHING MAY NEVER BE SOLVED. BUT THE SPRING THAW IS ABOUT TO CHANGE EVERYTHING. ON FRIDAY, APRIL 13TH, FOUR TEENAGERS HEAD OUT FOR AN AFTERNOON HORSEBACK RIDE. THEIR ROUTE TAKES THEM NEXT TO A SECLUDED 30-40 FOOT-DEEP DITCH SOUTH OF PINE RIVER.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: It's called the Nielson Road, and it's a gravel road off the beaten path. It's a road that is used by residents around there, but it's not highly traveled. It's an area that was isolated from the main highway.

NARRATION: ONE OF THE RIDERS SEES WHAT LOOKS LIKE A DISCARDED MANNEQUIN IN THE DITCH. BUT AS THEY GET CLOSER, THE TEENAGERS REALIZE IT'S THE DEAD BODY OF A WOMAN, HER LONG HAIR TANGLED IN THE WEEDS.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: They were high enough on the horsebacks to see down in the ditch where they could visibly see the body. Where, if you're driving by with a car, you would have not been able to see that.

NARRATION: IT'S RACHEL ANTHONY, MISSING FOR NEARLY TWO MONTHS. FOR RACHEL'S DAUGHTER, JESSICA, IT'S ANOTHER DAY SHE'LL NEVER FORGET.

JESSICA WINCH: They just outright told me. They said, "We found a body. We're pretty sure it's your mom." And I was like, "Wow." And I just told my boss, "I gotta go." And that was, that was the whirlwind, the second whirlwind. And basically, starting all over again, I feel, like, all the feelings. There's part of you that still wants somebody to, like... you know it is, but at the same time you want

somebody to be like, "Are you sure? Are you sure sure?" Like, I need you to confirm this for me. I need to see it with my own eyes. I remember the day, also, because it was April 13th. And it was Friday the 13th, and it was also quote, "Good Friday," and it was just, I'll never forget that as being, like, the worst possible Friday the 13th ever in my life, because it's kind of a joke that it was Good Friday. It was the opposite of Good Friday.

NARRATION: RACHEL'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, TRISHA, IS BACK HOME IN PENNSYLVANIA WHEN SHE LEARNS THAT HER MOTHER HAS BEEN FOUND.

TRISHA LEHR: Jessie called me and all I remember her saying is that they found a body and they think it's Mom's. And she asked me to help her make some phone calls to different family members and everything. And I was like, "Yeah, I'll help you out with that." I don't think it fully registered right away that that could be Mom or anything.

JESSICA WINCH: We were only told that she was killed due to, I believe how they word it was homicidal asphyxiation. So that's all we know. We don't know if she was strangled, if she was smothered. That's the technical term they gave us, and that's all we know. And it's on purpose. We were told that, because this is an unsolved case, if someone were to come forward, there are details that only they would know. And that's kind of, basically, the only way that police are going to be able to confirm that this person is telling the truth, or not telling the truth, because they told me that there are sick people out there who will admit to crimes that they didn't actually do. But finding her body gave me some kind of sense of, "Okay, maybe we can figure this out."

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: Where Rachel's body was found told law enforcement that, obviously, she was murdered sometime shortly after she was abducted. The body was found approximately 15 miles south of Pine River, which would be significant that the person or persons may more likely have lived south of Pine River, because that's the direction they were going. It's kind of a cut-across area that some local people use, but it's a known road to people that more so live in the general area. Obviously, that long after the abduction, there was strong decomposition with the body. There was no significant tire tracks or evidence that we did find. All the evidence that was obtained was from the body itself.

NARRATION: AND IT'S THERE THAT INVESTIGATOR DIEKMANN FINALLY HAS A VITAL CLUE IN SOLVING RACHEL'S DISAPPEARANCE AND MURDER.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: There is DNA on the body. We had the opportunity, through the database, to match and eliminate potential suspects. I believe that it was a blessing that Rachel's body was found at that time. Finding her body was very significant to this case, because now we had evidence.

NARRATION: THAT DNA WILL BE KEY TO IDENTIFYING AND CONFIRMING ANY FUTURE SUSPECT. WHAT IS MOST FRIGHTENING IS THAT RACHEL'S SAVAGE KILLER IS LIKELY LIVING IN THE PINE RIVER AREA, FREE TO STRIKE AGAIN.

JESSICA WINCH: I still don't know if it'd be somebody local, or somebody Mom knew that did this to her. Part of me wonders, because she has a strong personality, if she maybe spoke her mind to some

customer who just took it totally the wrong way, or if it was just some crazy person with some weird fetish. I don't know. I don't know. But one of the biggest things for me is, I still kind of lean towards the fact that I think it's somebody who was local, just because of knowing this entrance into the store that nobody knows about, the place that her body was found would be difficult for somebody who's out of town to even know that area exists, basically.

JESSICA WINCH: After what happened to Mom, even at first when she was just missing, it definitely did change my way of thinking of being safe, even in a small town. I'd never been one to be paranoid about locking my car, locking the door on the house. For a short time when this initially happened, I definitely was very paranoid. I'm not so much now, but there's still things I still always check. I cannot pump gas into my car without immediately locking my door. I always check the backseats before I get into my car. There's certain things I do now, I think, because of that, not just to be safe. And it's just made me kind of not as... I wouldn't say naïve, but trusting. It makes me feel a lot less trusting towards people. I've lost some trust that I used to have and the assumption of people being kind.

NARRATION: OVER THE YEARS, RACHEL'S DAUGHTERS JESSICA AND TRISHA HAVE STRUGGLED TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE LOSS OF THEIR MOTHER AND THE HAUNTING MYSTERY THAT LINGERS TO THIS DAY.

JESSICA WINCH: One of the things we were raised to do is try to be brave in front of people, and if you need to cry, you kind of do that on your own time, and so that's kind of how I grew up. And when all this happened, I was like, "I'm the one dealing with this. I need to just be super strong. Don't cry." Because I did that, people assumed or started rumors that I must have done it because I just wasn't emotional enough in front of other people. That's a pretty hard thing to hear because that just hurts me. That's so the opposite of me.

JESSICA WINCH: I put on quite a front for a very long time, and when I say a long time, I'm talking two years, and I just spent so much time trying to not break down that, at some point, I just didn't cry. And it doesn't mean I wasn't sad, because I definitely was sad. You know, I mean, you go through birthdays, you go through Christmases. The kids are grown up, they're not with their grandma. And it was, you know, I'd want to do something, some kind of hurdle would happen in my life, good or bad, and I'd be like, "I'm going to call Mom." Oh, yeah, I can't call Mom.

JESSICA WINCH: My breaking point was, weirdly enough, for some random day, I don't even honestly know what happened, but I was sitting at my desk, and I was like, "Whoa. Mom's dead." I ran to a private room at work. And I apparently was gone for quite some time because people started asking what happened to me and my boss found me just sobbing in a room somewhere. And she comes running and she's like, "What's wrong, what's wrong?" And I said, "My mom is dead." And I probably cried for the next two days after that.

TRISHA LEHR: The last time I saw Mom, she came down to Pennsylvania to visit me and my husband and we just enjoyed each other's company for a few days. And I remember watching her pull out of the driveway and for some reason, just wanting to run and stop her and make her stay for a few more days. But, she went on back home to Minnesota, so I had no idea that that would be the last time I'd

see her. One of the hardest things is, you know, not having those phone calls every week, just to hear her voice. And I guess that always felt like home, to hear mom's voice on the other end of the line.

MICHAEL DIEKMANN: This case is active right now. There are new investigators who have the case files and going through the evidence and matching up DNA to potential suspects and eliminating them. In order to solve this case, it's going to take more information. It's going to take someone to come forward that knows something, and we truly believe that there are people out there that do know something. It could be something simple as the behavior of a person, or the comments that a person has made, or talked about this years later. Anything. Anything that we can lay our hands on, we hope come forward. It's going to be information and DNA match that will solve this case. We just need to get our hands on the right person, or persons. There is a \$50,000 reward out there for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the persons or person involved in this murder-abduction of Rachel Anthony. These cases never go away. They're called cold cases, but they're still actively looked at and followed through when new information comes out. This case will be solved. It just may take a little time.

JESSICA WINCH: Even though I'm discouraged by how long it's taken, I do see things on TV or social media where very old cases have been solved, so it does give me a little bit of hope that maybe there's going to be some kind of new evidence that comes up and solves this whole thing. That would be great, and I hope it happens sooner than later.

NARRATION: 50-YEAR-OLD RACHEL ANTHONY WAS ABDUCTED FROM PINE RIVER, MINNESOTA ON THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 27TH, 2001. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT RACHEL'S MURDER OR DISAPPEARANCE, CALL THE MINNESOTA STATE CRIME BUREAU TIP LINE AT (877)-996-6222, OR THE CASS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TIP LINE AT 1-800-450-COPS, or 2677, OR GO TO UNSOLVED.COM.

NEXT, ON UNSOLVED MYSTERIES...

RAYMOND BUCKELEW: They drove by, they knocked on the door. No answer. So that was when our hearts sank into our stomachs because we knew what he was doing. We knew he was gone.

Unsolved Mysteries is a production of Cosgrove Meurer Productions and Cadence 13. It is executive produced by Terry Dunn Meurer and Chris Corcoran. Produced by Lloyd Lochridge, Christine Lenig, Courtney Ennis, and Paige Hymson. The Story Producer for this episode is Cynthia Bowles, and it was edited by Paul Yates. From Cadence 13, editing, mixing and mastering by Chris Basil, Andy Jaskiewicz and Bill Schultz. Production support by Sean Cherry and Ian Mandt. Artwork and design is by Curt Courtenay. Publicity by Josefina Francis and Hillary Schupf. The original theme music was composed by Gary Malkin and Michael Boyd.

THANKS FOR LISTENING TO EPISODE 12 OF UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.